



# Research Summary

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## CHILD MOLESTER RECIDIVISM

**Question:** How does the recidivism of child molesters differ from that of nonsexual criminals?

**Method:** The RCMP records of 191 child molesters and 137 nonsexual criminals were examined 15-30 years after their release from a maximum security provincial institution. The child molester sample was the same as that previously examined by Hanson, Steffy & Gauthier (1992, 1993).

**Answer:** The initial follow-up of the child molesters found that 42% were reconvicted of a sexual or violent crime during the 15-30 year follow-up period. Ten percent of the total sample of child molesters were first convicted for a sexual/violent crime between 10 and 31 years after release. Not all child molesters recidivated at the same rate. The highest rate of recidivism (77%) was for those with previous sexual offenses, who selected extrafamilial boy victims, and who were never married. In contrast, the long-term recidivism rate for the low risk offenders was less than 20%.

Although the long-term recidivism rates for the child molesters were substantial, the recidivism rates for the nonsexual criminals were even higher, 61% versus 83.2%, respectively, for any reconviction. That nonsexual criminals have higher recidivism rates than child molesters runs contrary to the common assumption that child molesters are a particularly high risk group of offenders. Nonsexual criminals tended to be reconvicted for property offenses and for nonsexual violent offenses. In contrast, child molesters had much higher rates of sexual recidivism (35%) than did the nonsexual criminal group (1.5%). The predictors of sexual recidivism (e.g., prior sexual offenses, victim type) were different from the predictors of nonsexual recidivism (e.g., low education, youth, nonviolent offenses).

### Policy Implications :

1. Child molesters have different programming needs than do nonsexual criminals. This result supports the practice of offering specialized treatment programs to sexual offenders.

2. Since not all child molesters are at high risk to reoffend, a range of information is required to identify those child molesters who truly are at high risk. A record of a single conviction for child molestation is insufficient for identifying the high risk offenders.
3. The risk factors for predicting sexual reoffending are different from the factors that predict general reoffending. Consequently, attention to different factors is required in the applied risk assessment of different offender groups.
4. Special policies concerning pardons for child molesters may be needed, since child molesters remain at risk for recidivism for many years, and there appears to be no critical time period after which their risk is substantially reduced.
5. Special provisions may be required for the long-term supervision of certain high risk child molesters in the community.

**Source:**

Hanson, R. K., Scott, H., & Steffy, R. A. (1995). A Comparison of Child Molesters and Non-Sexual Criminals: Risk Predictors and Long-term Recidivism. Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 32(3), 325-337.

## Other references:

Hanson, R. K., Steffy, R. A., & Gauthier, R. (1993). Long-term recidivism of child molesters. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 61, 646-652.

Hanson, R. K., Steffy, R. A., & Gauthier, R. (1992). Long-term follow-up of child molesters: Risk prediction and treatment outcome. (User Report No. 1992-02.) Ottawa: Corrections Branch, Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada.

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